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THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY TO HINDUISM*

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The question is not—What should be the attitude of the missionary to Hinduism? There can be but one answer to this question. It should be an attitude of sympathy and patience. It is quite another question—what should be his attitude towards that system of religion and way of deliverance from sin known as Hinduism? The reply given to this question by an increasing number of missionaries, as well as by not a few friends of Missions is, in substance, this: The missionary should not criticise the religion of the Hindu as though it were false. He should shew the Hindu the things that are true in his sacred books. He should shew that Christ taught these same truths, only more fully and clearly. He should look on Hinduism as he does on Judaism, both imperfect, but both preparations for the Gospel. He should strive—not so much to supplant, but rather to supplement and crown the religion of the Hindu.

Those who take this view, in their zeal to shew that there is no great gulf between the teachings of the Hindu Sacred books and the Gospels, that both contain “two great streams of religious thought which have long run side by side unconscious of each other,” are ignoring facts and obscuring truth. According to this view the Bhagavad Gita, containing the purest stream of Hindu thought, and the Gospels do not differ in origin or in essentials. Both are from God; both are good, only one is a larger, purer stream than the other. If I may be permitted to carry the figure a little further—Hinduism is the river Jumna and Christianity is the Ganges. Both are from the same source—the Himalayas; both are flowing in the same direction; both have flowed long apart but as they approach Allahabad (City of God) they draw together and there a third great stream, invisible, unites their waters and henceforth they flow on

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together to the sea. Now while this is only a parable, and not to be pressed too far, yet it fairly expresses the mind of those who in these latter days urge the Christian missionaries to shew the Hindu that his religious books contain and set forth the same truths as the Gospels. But what, if after sympathetic study, the missionary is convinced that there is a great and impassible gulf between the teaching of the Hindu Sacred books and the Gospels, as was Bishop Caldwell, 40 years a missionary in India. Sir M. Monier Williams, for many years Professor of Sanscrit at Oxford, after profound study of the Sacred Books of India, tells us that he found in them, here and there, many beautiful gems of thought. "I began to observe and trace out curious co-incidences and comparisons with our own Sacred Book of the East. I began, in short, to be a believer in what is called the evolution and growth of religious thought. 'These imperfect systems,' I said to myself, 'are clearly steps in the development of man's religious instincts and aspirations. They are interesting efforts of the human mind struggling upwards towards Christianity. Nay, it is probable that they were all intended to lead up to the One True Religion, and that Christianity is, after all, merely the climax, the complement, the fulfilment of them all.' Now there is unquestionably a delightful fascination about such a theory, and, what is more, there are really elements of truth in it. But I am glad of this opportunity of stating publicly that I am persuaded I was misled by its attractiveness, and that its main idea is quite erroneous. The charm and danger of it, I think, lie in its apparent liberality, breadth of view, and toleration. . . . What ! says the enthusiastic student of the science of religion, do you seriously mean to sweep away as so much worthless waste-paper, all these thirty stately volumes of the Sacred Books of the East just published by the University of Oxford ? No—not at all—nothing of the kind. On the contrary, we welcome these books. We ask every missionary to study their contents and thankfully lay hold of whatsoever things are true and of good report in them. But we warn him that there can be no greater mistake than to force these non-Christian bibles into conformity with some scientific theory of development, and then point to the Christian's Holy Bible as the crowning product of religious evolution. So far from this, these non-Christian bibles are all developments in the wrong direction. They all begin with some flashes of true light, and end in utter darkness. Pile them, if you will, on the left side of your study table, but place your own

Holy Bible on the right side—all by itself—all alone—and with a wide gap between.”

I have read carefully the Bhagavad Gita, parts of it again and again, not altogether as a critic, but with a desire to get its inner meaning. One cannot study the Gita without feeling that he is in touch with a strong mind struggling to solve some of the deep things of life, and out of this study must spring sympathy and respect. India has been studying the Gita for centuries, and yet the most learned Pundits who pore over it and the people who worship the Krishna exalted in it to be the supreme God, are so far as the Gita influences their thought and life, as far to-day from the knowledge of the true God as were the people before it was written. The Gita teaches pantheism. God is everything and everything is God. Hence the Pundit rises from the study of the Gita to worship the cow, the monkey and the snake, not in some obscure corner but in temples in Benares the Sacred City of India. The pundits and preachers of the Gita for centuries have never raised their voice against such worship.

Caste has done much to bring India to the dust and keep her there. Has the Gita a word to say against it? Not one, but on the contrary Krishna, accorded divine worship throughout the Gita, proclaims himself the creator of the four castes. Sir H. S. Maine in *Ancient Law* characterises caste as “the most disastrous and blighting of human institutions”—the every caste proclaimed in the Gita as created by God.

The above is enough to shew that the Gita and the Gospels are not from the same source, are not two great streams of religious thought that can ever unite as do the Jumna and the Ganges. They run in entirely different directions and can never be drawn together.

What then should be the attitude of the Christian missionary to Hinduism? and by Hinduism we mean pantheism, idolatry, transmigration of souls through millions of births, the Brahminical priesthood and caste. for if these be given up there is nothing left of Hinduism. His attitude should be that of a physician dealing with a very sick man. Of course he sympathizes with the sick man, but he has no sympathy to waste on the disease or the causes of it. The sick man may not believe that the water of the family well or village pond is impure, or that the cow is diseased and death is in the milk, or that the opium he takes is sapping his vitality, and so the physician must convince him of these facts, and he may have to use very strong and severe

language concerning the family well and family cow. Just so the missionary can have no word of sympathy for the pantheism and idolatry and the doctrine of transmigration of the soul through millions of beasts and birds and demons and men, and for caste, even though these be taught in the Bhagavad Gita and other books held sacred, and preached by learned Pundits; and even though he be proclaimed as lacking "the brain power to appreciate the inner meaning of Hinduism." By its fruits ye shall know a book from God. Wherever the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita has prevailed, and in proportion as it has prevailed, there has been blight. The darkest spots in India are where the light of the Gita has shone the brightest. "Doth the fountain? send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter . . . So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh."

On one of my preaching tours in the Allahabad District I stopped at the house of a Hindu gentleman who was just beginning the preparation of his morning draught of opium. In one hand he held a bright, beautiful brass *lotâ* nearly full of water, and into this he dipped a small cotton ball containing opium, which he pressed between his fingers until the opium dissolved. The mixture was now ready and he drank it off. This was his habit twice a day. The water was good, and the cotton was good, and the *lotâ* was clean and bright, but notwithstanding this the mixture was bad. I made no sympathetic allusion to the water or cotton, nor even gave an admiring glance at the beautiful *lotâ*, but did say a few plain words as to the sure effects, sooner or later, of the mixture. What a waste of words it would have been to discuss with this man the quality of the water or cotton, or the beauty of the *lotâ*. A sympathetic attitude! Yes toward the man, but not towards the mixture. Although the itinerant missionary was not able "to appreciate the inner meaning" of the mixture, he did well to shew its evil effects on the body, mind and soul of the man, as well as on his family, community and country, and leave to some one else to shew the man what a large proportion of pure water and good cotton can be extracted from a *lotâ* full of the mixture.

Considered merely as literature there is much in the religious books of the Hindus to admire, but the missionary is asked by the Pundit and Priest to consider these books not as literature but as a message from God to man. Prof. Max Muller says—"According to the orthodox views of Indian theologians, not a single line of the Veda was the work of

human authors. The whole Veda is in some way or other the work of the Deity, and even those who received the revelation, or, as they express it, those who saw it, were not supposed to be ordinary mortals, but beings raised above the level of common humanity, and less liable therefore to error in the reception of revealed truth." The Bhagavad Gita is largely the words of Krishna who is spoken of in it as God, and who is regarded by all Hindus as a true incarnation of God. The missionary is not able to praise these books for the same reason that he does not praise a false rupee. The rupee has a quantity of good silver in it; it may be bright and beautiful and it has the King's face on it, professing to be approved by him. It looks very much like a good rupee, but it is not, and the more the silver in it, and the more the face looks like the King's, the more dangerous it is and the more difficult to detect. The missionary can get up no enthusiasm over that rupee, notwithstanding the amount of good silver in it and the face of the King on it. For the same reason he has never been able to grow enthusiastic in his praises of the Sacred Books of India. They profess to be from God, but they are not. The speakers in them are not gods and goddesses, or incarnations of God, although they are so represented and are believed to be by the Pundits and by millions in India. The claim made in behalf of Rama and Krishna, that they are incarnations of God, force the missionary to take the attitude towards them which he takes toward the rupee which professes to come from the Government, but has not. He sympathizes with the man who has inherited the rupee, but he is bound to undeceive him, unpleasant as the task may be.

Mr. Froude writes of Thomas Carlyle: "He made one remark which is worth recording. In earlier years he had spoken contemptuously of the Athanasian controversy,—of the Christian world torn in pieces over a diphthong: and he would ring the changes in broad Annandale on the Homocousion and the Homoiousion. He now told me that he perceived Christianity itself to have been at stake. If the Arians had won, it would have dwindled away to a legend. Nor, in fact, is this mere theory. The Goths were converted to Christianity in its Arian form; they accepted Christ as a hero-God, *like those to which they were accustomed* (italics are mine). Provided thus with a platform which lay between heathenism and Christianity, they came to a premature halt. The Christianity of the later Goths in Spain appears to have ad-

mitted of a certain impartial veneration for the Christian God and heathen idols. 'We do not,' says Agila, the envoy, from the Arian Leovigild to Chilperic at Tours 'We do not reckon it a crime to worship this and that: for we say in our common speech, it is no harm if a man passing between heathen altars and a Church of God makes his reverence in both directions.'"

Had the early Church in any way countenanced the belief in and praise of the hero-gods of non-Christians, or encouraged her missionaries to recognize them as prophets of God, only not so high and noble as Christ, His teaching the completion and fulfilment of theirs, the door would have been opened wide for the rough German tribes, to whom the conception of demigods was familiar, to continue their worship after baptism, and that would have meant disaster to the Church. This is not without a word of warning to us in India. Hindus by the thousands are coming into the Church of Christ. If they are taught that Rama and Krishna are prophets of the true God—their messages in the Rámáyan and Bhagavad Gita preparations for Christ as were the messages of the prophets Moses and Isaiah in the Old Testament, then we have opened the door of the Church for the admission of the nine incarnations of Vishnú, Krishna the eighth among them, with Christ added as the tenth. Are we willing to place Christ in the class and rank of the incarnations of Vishnú? Hindus are willing to place Him there, and they will be encouraged in this conception of Him if we recognize these incarnations as prophets, their message a part of God's revelation. If this view be correct then the apostles were wrong in not presenting Christ's teaching as the fulfilment of the thought of Socrates, Plato and the Greek Philosophers—the crown of Greek wisdom. On the contrary, they taught that "the world through its wisdom knew not God," and they did not hesitate to speak of that wisdom, so far as it attempted to reveal God, as foolishness. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." The Church in India, as the Church in the days of the apostles, can take, with safety to herself and with loyalty to Christ and the Scriptures, only one attitude towards the incarnations set forth in the Sacred Books of India, and that is to refuse to give them a place among those sent from God with a message to

men, as well as to refuse to regard these books as foreshadowing the message of the Gospel as does the Old Testament.

We are told that Christ's attitude to the Old Testament ought to be our attitude to the Sacred Books of India. Very well, let us see where this will lead us. What was our Lord's attitude to the Old Testament Scriptures? This is the way He appealed to them—"These are they which bear witness of me": "If ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" "These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, how that things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me": "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished." Can the missionary imagine our Lord speaking of Krishna and the Bhagavad Gítá as He does of Moses and the Old Testament. Can the missionary, however sympathetic his study of the Sacred Books of India, reach the conclusion that the writers "spake from God being moved by the Holy Spirit," and that their writings are "inspired of God....profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

In an address by Sir Monier-Williams on "The Holy Bible and the Sacred Books of the East," he warns missionaries against compromise and concessions,—because of the gulf between the Gospel of Christ and the Sacred Books of India, a gulf "which severs the one from the other utterly, hopelessly, and for ever—not a mere rift which may be easily closed up—not a mere rift across which the Christian and the non-Christian may shake hands and interchange similar ideas in regard to essential truths—but a veritable gulf which cannot be bridged over by any science of religious thought; yes, a bridgless chasm which no theory of evolution can ever span. Go forth, then, ye missionaries, in your Master's name; go forth into all the world, and, after studying all its false religions and philosophies, go forth and fearlessly proclaim to suffering humanity the plain, the unchangeable, the eternal facts of the Gospel—nay, I might almost say the stubborn, the

unyielding, the inexorable facts of the Gospel. Dare to be downright with all the uncompromising courage of your own Bible, while with it your watchwords are love, joy, peace, reconciliation. Be fair ; be charitable ; be Christ-like but let there be no mistake. Let it be made absolutely clear that Christianity cannot, must not, be watered down to suit the palate of either Hindú, Parsí, Confucianist, Buddhist, or Muhammadan, and that whosoever wishes to pass from the false religion to the true can never hope to do so by the rickety planks of compromise."

India has heard long enough the praises of Rama and Krishna, worshipping them as incarnations of God. It is not for missionaries, unwittingly, to encourage the Pundits in proclaiming these hero-gods as objects of worship. If it be admitted that the books, in which are recorded the words and deeds of Rama and Krishna, are to be received as a part of God's revelation, even as the Old Testament, then can we refuse to receive the teaching of these incarnations as to the character of God, the way of deliverance from sin, the future state of the soul, caste and idolatry. How can we reconcile the character of God as revealed by Krishna with the character of God as revealed by Christ. Instead of such admissions and concessions, in the hope winning a more favourable hearing for the claims of Christ, is it not the duty of the missionary, not a pleasant one, to shew that the incarnations, whose praises are sung and worship commended in these books, were sinful men, themselves needing deliverance from the power of evil. Surely the books which exalt characters such as Krishna cannot be from God. Surely the men, who wrote them were not "moved by the Holy Spirit." If this be so, why not say so.

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